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Chairman: Mr. de Rojas ..... (Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 98: Environment and sustainable development (*continued*) (A/52/25, A/52/112, A/52/217-S/1997/507, A/52/284, A/52/318, A/52/347, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/460, A/52/514-S/1997/815)

(c) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (*continued*) (A/52/412)

(e) Convention on Biological Diversity (*continued*) (A/52/413, A/52/441)

(f) Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (*continued*) (A/52/319, A/52/413)

1. **Mr. Powles** (New Zealand) said that his delegation shared the concerns of its island neighbours and other nations vulnerable to the effects of climate change, in particular, rising sea levels. Accordingly, his country was committed to achieving a successful outcome at the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Kyoto, which should lay the foundation for durable solutions to problems caused by climate change. To that end, there must be a provision for mechanisms which kept the costs of achieving emissions reductions to a minimum. An effective response to combating climate change must recognize the impact of human activity on the climate by taking into account all greenhouse gases and the role of sinks in lowering carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. Although the developed countries must take the initial steps, global solutions required the participation of all countries.

2. His country was an active participant in the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was the appropriate forum for debate on biodiversity issues; it therefore believed that the Committee should not continue to make pronouncements on the work of the Convention and that it should consider adopting a single omnibus resolution on the environment conventions at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

3. Environmental issues were of particular importance to the small island States of the South Pacific, given the fragility of their ecosystems. His country therefore was a committed supporter of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and its official development assistance programme had adopted an environmental strategy which provided support for regional and national initiatives which addressed environmental issues.

4. His delegation would continue to support capacity-building for disaster planning and management and the development of early-warning systems to mitigate the effects of natural disasters.

5. **Mr. Prendergast** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the 14 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the rapid development of the vulnerability index envisaged in the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States was particularly important for the States members of the Caribbean Community because those countries faced increasing difficulties obtaining concessional aid. Developing island States faced the possibility of no longer being included among the least developed countries, even though they faced harsh economic and environmental problems which threatened their very survival.

6. The members of CARICOM were aware of the ongoing efforts to strengthen coordination with donors for effective resource mobilization with the aim of implementing the Programme of Action and were prepared to cooperate in that regard. They also welcomed the progress achieved in the compilation of the four-volume directory of experts on developing island States and institutions designed to facilitate the capacities of those States and in the establishment of a pilot information network to facilitate information exchange through the Internet.

7. The implementation of the Programme of Action required that a focal point be maintained in the Secretariat. It therefore was necessary to strengthen the Small Island Developing States Unit and enhance its capacity to provide advisory services to those countries. CARICOM, which had accorded high priority to the implementation of the Programme of Action, had convened a ministerial meeting in November 1997 in Barbados to consider the progress made and problems encountered in that regard. The CARICOM secretariat also had given priority to sustainable development issues and had committed itself to a coordinated regional approach to policy formulation and implementation and to enhanced information systems networks to monitor and assess the implementation of regional measures. The objective was to encourage CARICOM countries to develop and coordinate regional activities and programmes on the environment, natural disasters, human settlements, meteorological services, renewable energy and scientific and technical infrastructure building.

8. Participants at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had recognized that it was necessary to support national and regional efforts to implement the Programme of Action. It also was important to assist countries in establishing the requisite infrastructure and strengthen their national human and institutional capacities.

9. **Mr. Ito** (Japan) said that the major task of the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which his country would soon host in Kyoto, was to adopt an international agreement committing the international community to preventing global warming on the basis of legally binding, realistic and equitable targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases. His delegation called for the full cooperation of all participating countries in ensuring the successful outcome of the Conference, which required a pragmatic approach in the deliberations.

10. His delegation fully recognized that small island developing States were particularly vulnerable to the threats which many environmental problems posed and believed that special attention should continue to be paid to their development. In that context, he noted that in their joint declaration, the participants in the Japan-South Pacific Forum summit meeting, held in October 1997, had recognized the importance of work under way to develop a vulnerability index and had urged that the special circumstances of Forum island countries should be taken into account.

11. His country would continue to cooperate with small island developing States to promote their sustainable development and would do its utmost to strengthen its relations with island States in the Caribbean.

12. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil) said that in seeking to impose new commitments on developing countries, particularly with regard to emissions reductions, the major polluter countries were clearly attempting to discredit the very principles of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and to derail the negotiations on the basis of the faulty assumption that developing countries were not contributing their share to the international community's efforts to resolve the problem of climate change. In fact, the developing countries were already actively participating in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gases through an array of industrial, fiscal and technological measures that were helping to change their energy matrix. Thus, Brazil relied primarily on renewable and clean sources of energy, had significantly reduced its fossil fuel subsidies, had encouraged the implementation of energy efficiency measures and had increased the price of fuel. The substitution of alcohol for gasoline had also helped to reduce fossil fuel emissions.

13. The efforts made by Brazil and many other developing countries compared impressively with the lack of progress in industrialized countries. While it was true that the aggregate annual emissions of developing countries were expected to equal those of industrialized countries in about 40 years, it would take a long time before their cumulative effect on global warming was comparable to that of the emissions of industrialized countries. Moreover, the increased emissions of developing countries resulted from their efforts to provide for the basic needs of their populations while, in the industrialized countries, they were due to unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Rather than insist on joint fulfilment of the commitments undertaken under the Convention by developed and developing countries, which actually shifted the responsibility to take action to the developing countries, it would be preferable to promote cooperation between them.

14. At the first Conference of the Parties, held in Berlin in 1995, Brazil had submitted a specific proposal, many of whose elements were reflected in the joint document proposed by the Group of 77 and China on a negotiating text. The developing countries, based on their common position established in Bonn, were determined to require the Parties referred to in annex I of the Convention to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions significantly within specified time-frames until the year 2020. Countries should be given a certain degree of flexibility with regard to measures and policies to be adopted, and the "polluter pays" principle and the level of responsibility of each annex I country in aggravating the process of climate change must be taken into account.

15. Brazil also advocated the establishment of a fund to assist developing countries to achieve sustainable development and meet the ultimate objective of the Convention. The fund would be financed by those parties which did not comply with their agreed commitments under the Protocol. The Conference of the Parties to be held in Kyoto would provide an opportunity for the industrialized countries to demonstrate their intention to mitigate climate change.

16. **Ms. Hawkins** (Australia) said that international agreements of crucial importance to the global environment had been concluded in the past five years, particularly in the areas of climate change, desertification control, biological diversity and hazardous chemicals management. The recent special session of the General Assembly, however, had made it clear that much still remained to be done in such priority

areas as climate change, forests, freshwater resources, oceans and sustainable cities.

17. Her delegation welcomed the decisions taken at the special session with regard to forests and called for the implementation of the 135 proposals for action by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, whose work was supported by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests. The establishment of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests would be helpful in promoting the sustainable management of forest resources at the global level and examining medium-term institutional and legal arrangements, such as the adoption of a convention on forests.

18. Describing her country's activities in the area of environmental protection, she said that Australia had been one of the founders of the International Coral Reef Initiative and currently hosted its secretariat. Moreover, her Government was determined to work for the adoption of a permanent and total international ban on whaling.

19. Australia attached great importance to the development issues of small island States and had incorporated the priorities of the Barbados Programme of Action in its development assistance programmes. It welcomed the convening of a special session of the General Assembly in 1999, to be devoted to an assessment and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action.

20. She drew attention to the work of the Committee for Development Planning on elaborating a vulnerability index, which would make it possible to gauge the economic and ecological vulnerability of small island States. That work was only in its preliminary phase, and the United Nations system should cooperate with the Commonwealth secretariat in that connection.

21. Australia was aware of the potential threat of climate change and had taken measures to fulfil its commitments under the Framework Convention, particularly with regard to limiting greenhouse gas emissions. It was also working with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme with a view to building the capacity of the region's island countries to deal with the impact of climate change and sea-level rise. With regard to the current negotiations on a new international agreement on climate change, in which Australia was actively participating, she said that it would be necessary to set differentiated targets reflecting the specific situation of each country, in order to ensure equity and cost-effectiveness and thereby guarantee greater effectiveness and durability. The question of climate change could not be resolved without the cooperation of the entire international community; the Kyoto Conference should provide an opportunity to determine procedures and time-frames for limiting and eliminating the greenhouse gas emissions of developing countries.

22. Lastly, turning to the question of hazardous chemicals, she said that her country welcomed the results of the activities of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety with regard to risk assessment, the harmonization of classification, the exchange of information and capacity-building. Australia was particularly interested in persistent organic pollutants and was prepared to help other countries benefit from its experience in anticipation of the intergovernmental negotiations organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which would begin in 1998. It further welcomed the elaboration of the convention on prior informed consent, which would facilitate decision-making with regard to imports of hazardous chemicals. Australia had just amended its legislation on hazardous waste management and had therefore fulfilled all its obligations under the Basel Convention; it was also providing financial and technical support for the establishment of regional centres for training and technology transfer in hazardous waste management.

23. **Mr. Özügergin** (Turkey) said that demographic growth and the growth of world economic activity had placed stress on the global biological system. It had become increasingly difficult to dispose of waste without harming the environment. Mining and logging had played a significant role in the depletion of forests and wetlands, and the irreversible disappearance of those natural reproduction fields had caused a rapid reduction in biodiversity; an estimated 50,000 species became extinct every year. Other factors, such as industrialization, urbanization, the destruction of forests, soil erosion and tourism were also serious threats to biological diversity, but environmental protection was not a priority concern in countries with a high rate of population growth. Turkey, being rich in plant species and anxious to preserve its flora and fauna, had ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and was committed to monitoring soil erosion. At the same time, unprecedented awareness-building campaigns were drawing the attention of public opinion and the private sector to the risk of biodiversity loss.

24. With regard to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, he reiterated his delegation's request to be excluded from the annexes, maintaining that annexes I and II included the developed countries and the countries with economies in transition and entailed responsibilities which Turkey was unable to assume for the time being. Moreover, statistical data showed that Turkey's anthropogenic emissions, energy consumption and contribution to global warming were but a fraction of those

of annex II countries; therefore, a re-evaluation of Turkey's inclusion in that annex was warranted. He stressed, nonetheless, that steps had been taken to establish realistic projections and guidelines for emissions for the years 2000, 2005 and 2010, along with measures to ensure their implementation. Turkey was aware of its responsibilities and complied with Agenda 21 and the Climate Technology Initiative of OECD. It believed, however, that the limits imposed should be based on equity and fairness and should take into account the responsibilities and circumstances of the parties concerned.

25. **Mr. Delaney** (Papua New Guinea) said that the recent special session of the General Assembly had been disappointing, for the participants had failed to adopt a strong political declaration and had been unable to agree on specific targets for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that polluted the global environment and led to sea-level rise. However, political will was lacking, especially with respect to how to meet the commitments made under Agenda 21.

26. His country, which had one of the largest pools of biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region, was participating in the negotiations on a biosafety protocol under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and wished to stress the importance of regulating the transboundary movement of genetically modified organisms. An international regime with standards lower than those already applied by developed countries was unacceptable, as it would apply a double standard to the developed and developing countries.

27. With regard to climate change, he welcomed the efforts to strengthen coordination between the United Nations system and the international community in natural disaster response mechanisms at the field level. As far as follow-up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was concerned, he welcomed the financial and technical assistance provided by the Global Environment Facility, but was concerned that the Conference of the Parties to be held in Kyoto might adopt a non-binding protocol, granting those countries that had not yet met their obligations under the Framework Convention 10 more years. On the other hand, the first Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification had reached a consensus on the implementation of that Convention, which he welcomed. Although Papua New Guinea did not have deserts, it was aware of the importance of the problem. His country had experienced serious drought and frost as a result of the El Niño phenomenon; it had relied on resources provided by national and provincial authorities, which had been supplemented by assistance from the international community and non-governmental organizations.

28. He welcomed the priority actions adopted by the special session of the General Assembly with respect to the Barbados Plan of Action, including the review of its implementation scheduled for 1999. However, it acknowledged that further work was required to strengthen existing regional, subregional and national institutions, including UNEP, which was the leading global authority on the environment. Lastly, he welcomed the work done by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other bodies, including the Committee for Development Planning, with a view to the establishment of a vulnerability index for small island developing States.

29. **Ms. Yong Jie** (China) said that climate change was a source of concern to all countries. Since the entry into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, much had been done to address the problem, but it was clear that greenhouse gas emissions were increasing steadily. The international community must therefore demonstrate political will to deal with the issue, which affected the future of the whole world.

30. As a first step, the commitments undertaken under the Convention, especially the target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000, should be met. The Berlin Mandate had given a new impetus to the negotiations on article 4, paragraph 2, of the Convention, and it was to be hoped that the third Conference of the Parties in Kyoto would take effective steps in that area.

31. Some countries argued that developing countries must now assume an equal share of responsibility for the commitments entered into under the Convention. Such arguments should be rejected because they clearly ran counter to the principles embodied in the Framework Convention. The Convention stated that that largest share of global emissions of greenhouse gases had originated in developed countries. Indeed, it was the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption long pursued by the developed countries which had led to the degradation of the global environment. That adversely affected the developing countries, whose energy consumption and emissions of greenhouse gases were barely enough to meet their basic economic and social development needs. On the eve of the Kyoto Conference, it was therefore necessary to recall the provision of article 4, paragraph 7, of the Convention which clearly stated that "the extent to which developing country Parties will effectively implement their commitment under the Convention will depend on the effective implementation by developed country Parties of their commitments under the Convention related to financial resources and transfer of technology".

32. Thus, China, whose per capita energy consumption amounted to only one seventh of that of developed countries and whose intention was to maintain a high pace of economic development to eradicate poverty, would nevertheless endeavour to maintain its energy consumption at substantially lower levels than those of developed countries, and to reduce anthropogenic emissions to a much greater extent, in order to combat the adverse effects of climate change.

33. The Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States was an important follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The international community and the relevant organs of the United Nations should provide the requisite financial and technical assistance to help small island States to implement the Barbados Programme of Action.

34. **Ms. Shuweikar** (Maldives) said that climate change was the result of excessive use of the earth's resources, through industrialization, which consumed a great deal of fossil fuel, and through progress in medicine, which had contributed to population growth. Currently, the more highly developed the country, the more fuel it consumed: 70 per cent of the energy generated from fossil fuels was consumed by the 25 per cent of the world population living in the industrialized countries.

35. Deforestation was another example of the overuse of nature; it was particularly damaging because forests helped to absorb carbon dioxide. The point had been reached where the heavy gases which prevented heat from escaping were on the rise, the ozone layer which helped filter ultra-violet rays was being depleted, and the forests which could absorb those gases were being reduced.

36. Clearly, every country had a role to play in halting climate change. But it was unfair for a country which used 10,000 kg of coal per year to argue that it would not reduce its consumption unless those which used 200 kg agreed to do likewise. Futile polemics should be avoided and industrialized and developing countries should work together to ratify the various instruments that had already been adopted, especially Agenda 21. The Maldives had attached great importance to the Barbados Conference but unfortunately, nothing had been done to mobilize the resources that were needed to implement the programmes which were crucial for low-lying countries, all of which stood to suffer should the sea-level rise.

37. The Maldives had taken regulatory measures to preserve the environment and had hosted many environmental meetings, but it alone could do little to halt global warming. Certainly, the adoption of laws to reduce emissions, eliminate chlorofluorocarbon carbons and slow deforestation would be a first step, but in the electronic era, it was important to disseminate information about lifestyles that were less wasteful and more environment-friendly for the sake of future generations.

38. The Kyoto Conference would be an historic opportunity to agree on legally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Maldives would have difficulty in accepting a target below the 20 per cent reduction in levels by the year 2005, as contained in the protocol drawn up by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

39. **Ms. Leu Agosti** (Observer for Switzerland) said that her delegation welcomed the results obtained at the first meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, especially regarding the Global Mechanism and the promising tripartite cooperation between IFAD, UNDP and the World Bank.

40. Unfortunately, the political will to combat desertification and to make efforts to combat desertification a development priority in all affected countries was lacking both in the North and in the South. Switzerland would continue to contribute to the implementation of the Convention, and she stressed the importance of the participation of civil society and of the non-governmental organizations which had been invited to participate in the Conference of Parties.

41. The protection of the global climate was a priority for Switzerland. At the eighth meeting of the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate, it had reiterated that it was committed to reducing its carbon dioxide emissions to 10 per cent below 1990 levels by the year 2010. The industrialized countries must also commit themselves, in Kyoto, to a substantial reduction in their greenhouse gas emissions, by means of a protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and must undertake to develop non-polluting technologies and to change their patterns of consumption particularly with regard to energy. By assuming their own responsibilities and fulfilling their own obligations, the industrialized countries could then invite the developing countries to participate in efforts to protect the global climate so as to ensure the sustainable development of all countries.

42. Turning to the issue of disaster prevention and preparedness she said that primary responsibility for disaster prevention lay with States. Switzerland had established a national body to oversee its participation in the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, and it would support the secretariat for the Decade during the preparations for the 1999 Geneva conference which would provide an

opportunity for assessing progress and developing strategies for natural disaster prevention in the twenty-first century. Switzerland attached equal importance to prevention and to relief and reconstruction activities in disasters; it had a long tradition in the area of humanitarian relief through the direct intervention of the Swiss disaster relief corps and through its support to partner organizations. Under the planned reform of the United Nations, the future Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator would not be responsible for programmes relating to the prevention of natural disasters; they would be transferred to UNDP. In an effort to achieve the greatest possible synergy with the operational agencies, UNDP should keep such programmes in Geneva, where many of them were established.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.